

Message Text

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70

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R 011505Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9936

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTO DOMINGO 0870

DEPT PLS PASS TO OPIC

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT

SUBJECT: AGRARIAN REFORM ASPECTS OF PRESIDENT BALAGUER'S
INDEPENDENCE DAY SPEECH

REF: SANTO DOMINGO 0869

1. PRESIDENT BALAGUER DEVOTED CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION TO THE GODR'S AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAM IN HIS FEBRUARY 27 INDEPENDENCE DAY SPEECH, CITING IT AS "THE COUNTRY'S MOST IMPORTANT ACHIEVEMENT IN 1973" AND CLAIMING THAT SINCE THE 1972 AGRARIAN LAWS WERE ENACTED, A PROFOUND MODIFICATION IN LAND TENANCY HAD OCCURRED.

2. CRITICIZING THOSE WHO FOUND THE GODR AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAM "TIMID," THE PRESIDENT STATED THAT OVER RD\$20 MILLION HAD BEEN SPENT ON ACQUISITION OF PRIVATELY-HELD LAND (AMOUNTING TO SOME 40,654 ACRES) AND IMPROVEMENTS FOR AGRARIAN REFORM PURPOSES. THE PRESIDENT STOUTLY DEFENDED AND LAUDED THE COLLECTIVIZATION PROJECTS INITIATED BY THE INSTITUTO AGRARIO DOMINICANO (IAD) ON THESE RECENTLY ACQUIRED LANDS. STATING HIS DESIRE TO IMPROVE THE LIFE OF
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THE CAMPESINO, BALAGUER PLEDGED HIS GOVERNMENT TO "AN

AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAM EVER WIDER AND BETTER ORIENTED."

3. BALAGUER ALSO INDICATED THAT THE ONLY SHORTCOMING UNDER THE CURRENT AGRARIAN REFORM LAWS WAS THE LACK OF LEGAL PROVISIONS REGARDING THE DISPOSITION OF LANDS UNDER THE AGRARIAN PROGRAM IN THE EVENT OF THE DEATH OF THE CAMPESINO WORKING THE LAND. TO AVOID THE CREATION OF ADDITIONAL MINIFUNDIA, BALAGUER SAID THAT HE WOULD PROPOSE A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT WHICH WOULD ESTABLISH THAT SUCH LAND REVERT TO THE STATE UNDER THE CONDITION THAT THE STATE PROMPTLY DELIVER IT TO ANOTHER LANDLESS CAMPESINO.

4. NOTING THAT IN 1972 HE HAD PROMISED TO SUBMIT LEGISLATION TO CONGRESS TO STRENGTHEN HIS 1972 AGRARIAN REFORM LAWS, BALAGUER SAID HE WAS PRESENTING A PROPOSAL TO CONGRESS WHICH WOULD GIVE THE GODR AUTHORITY TO ACQUIRE PRIVATELY-OWNED CATTLE LAND WHICH COULD BE BETTER USED FOR IAD SETTLEMENTS DEDICATED TO AGRICULTURAL CROPS. THE PRESIDENT PROMISED, HOWEVER, THAT THIS LAND WOULD BE ACQUIRED GRADUALLY AND IN A MANNER THAT WOULD NOT DAMAGE THE LOCAL CATTLE INDUSTRY.

5. COMMENT. THE PRESIDENT'S CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION TO AGRARIAN REFORM AGAIN REFLECTED HIS APPARENT DETERMINATION TO MOVE FORWARD, HOWEVER CAUTIOUSLY, ON THIS FRONT. NONETHELESS, IN HIS SPEECH, HE SEEMED MORE INTERESTED IN DEFENDING HIS EXISTING AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAM -- WHICH RECENTLY HAD BEEN CRITICIZED AS INADEQUATE BY MUCH OF THE OPPOSITION -- THAN IN PRESENTING NEW OR DRASTIC MEASURES. INDEED, THE ONE CONCRETE PROPOSAL HE DID PRESENT -- STATE ACQUISITION OF CATTLE LAND -- ACTUALLY CAN BE CARRIED OUT UNDER EXISTING AGRARIAN LAWS.

EVER THE CONSUMMATE POLITICIAN AND UNDOUBTEDLY AWARE OF THE NUMERICAL VOTING POWER OF THE COUNTRYSIDE IN THE MAY 16 ELECTIONS, THE PRESIDENT ALSO PROBABLY HAD IN MIND THE STRENGTHENING OF HIS POSITION AMONG THE CAMPESINOS WHILE BEING CAREFUL NOT TO
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GENERATE UNNECESSARILY NEW FEARS AMONG THE LARGE CATTLEMEN. THUS, THE PRESIDENT HAS AGAIN TAKEN ANOTHER STEP FORWARD TO DRAMATIZE HIS CONTINUING APPARENT CONCERN WITH IMPROVING THE LOT OF THE LANDLESS CAMPESINO, YET DONE SO IN A CAUTIOUS AND CALCULATED MANNER TO REDUCE TO A MINIMUM POSSIBLE NEGATIVE POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS AMONG THE POWERFUL LARGE LANDHOLDERS.

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